STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Sarabjit Singh, facing death sentence in Pakistan

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): Sir, I rise to inform hon'ble Members of the issue of Sarabjit Singh, an Indian national in Pakistani custody facing death sentence. The media have reported that his mercy petition has been turned down by the President of Pakistan. We have received no formal intimation of this from the Government of Pakistan. But according to press reports, the black warrant has been issued and the sentence will be carried out on 1st April, 2008. Our High Commission in Islamabad has sought details from the Government of Pakistan.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan, in a judgement on 18th August, 2005 had upheld award of death sentence to Sarabjit Singh for causing explosions at various places in Pakistan. At out instance, Consular access to Sarabjit Singh was provided by the Government of Pakistan for the first time on August 30, 2005 to the Indian High Commission. Thereafter his national status was confirmed. A review petition against the death sentence was also filed in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The petition was dismissed by the Suprement Court in March 2006. A mercy petition was thereafter filed with the President of Pakistan which now, according to news reports, has been turned down. Throughout this period, the Government of India have continued to urge the Government of Pakistan to take a sympathetic and humanitarian view of this case.

Hon'ble Members are aware that since my January 2007 visit to Pakistan, both Governments have put in place certain institutional arrangements, including a new Agreement on Consular Access and a joint Judicial Committee, in order to facilitate the resolution of consular issues. A delegation of family members of missing Indian defence personnel was also able to visit Pakistan last year. These initiatives may lead to an improvement of the situation for our prisoners.

It is in this context and in the same spirit that we appeal to the Government of Pakistan to treat Sarabjit Singh's case with clemency on humanitarian grounds.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The clarification will take place tomorrow.

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ (Madhya Pradesh): Not today?

SHRI TARLOCHAN SINGH: Sir, this is not enough.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Clarification will take place tomorrow. ...*(Interruptions)*... It has been fixed by the Chairman. ...*(Interruptions)*....

SHRI TARLOCHAN SINGH: The Prime Minister spent sleepless nights for a case in Australia. Here a person is going to be hanged. What is the view of the Government on that? Compare this with what you did for a person in Australia.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please sit down.